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TO THE TENANT FARMERS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

FARMERS' GRIEVANCES

AND

HOW TO REMEDY THEM AT THE
GENERAL ELECTION.

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| 1. TENANT RIGHT. | 4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT |
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BY

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FARMERS' GRIEVANCES,

AND HOW TO REMEDY THEM AT THE GENERAL ELECTION.

The Tenant Farmers of Great Britain are very generally indisposed to participate actively in political contests. They vote, if they vote at all, as a matter of tradition, and the questions at issue between Conservatives and Liberals seem to them to bear but a remote relation to their own immediate interests. It is the intention of the following pages to point out to the Farmers that at no time in the history of the country has a general election more vitally involved their future, and the renewed prosperity or growing decadence of the farming industry is now dependent upon the way in which they give their votes. The Tenant-Farmers are not an unimportant class. They are computed to number 561,000 in Great Britain and to own in crops and live and dead stock about one-fifth of the whole capital value of the land. Not only are they capitalists, but they exercise such skill in the application of their capital, despite the artificial impediments with which they have to contend, that the comparatively unfertile soil of the United Kingdom has been rendered the most fruitful in the world. An English acre yields on the average $29\frac{1}{2}$ bushels of wheat, while in France the same area will only produce $16\frac{1}{2}$ bushels, in Austria $12\frac{1}{2}$, in the United States 12, and in Russia $5\frac{1}{2}$. Similarly with barley; and as to live stock England has no rivals. A class which by its energy renders such signal service to the community deserves attention and respect.

The enterprise
of the British
Farmer.

It is the fact, however, as Farmers too well know, that the experience of the last few years has been in the highest degree calamitous. The average crop of wheat has only been three times reached between 1869 and 1879. The average prices have also been low. The imports of wheat from abroad have increased, so that out of about 25,000,000 quarters consumed in the cereal year 1879-80, 18,126,000 will be foreign grown. The total agricultural deficiency from 1876-9 has been £30,000,000; in Scotland £10,000,000 annually from 1877-9. As an example, cheese has fallen since 1874 from 80s. to 55s. and less per cwt. The average price of cheese is reckoned at from £25 to £30 per ton lower than it was in 1873. The price of butter has fallen 20—30 per cent. Nor is this all. In the meantime the Farmers' outgoings have been steadily mounting up. The cost of implements and machinery has risen 25 per cent., and not only has the cost of labour increased at about the same rate, but in consequence of the emigration which has resulted from the extension of education to the labourers the labour left behind is that of the comparatively unskilful and unintelligent.

Foreign
competition.

Those who are engaged in legal business know best to what straits the Farmer is reduced. An abstract of the number of bills of sale between the 1st July, 1878, and 1st March, 1879, only eight months, shews 1,733 pledges of their property by Farmers, as against little more than half that number in the corresponding months of the previous year. The rate at which these bills of sale were given during the last week of February, 1879, was 6,000 per annum, and since that date Farmers' circumstances have, as we know, been drifting from bad to worse.

Can the
Farmer's
difficulties be
relieved?

It is plain, then, that the Farmer's position has become one of extreme difficulty, and the question whether that difficulty admits of alleviation is of urgent importance both to himself and the community. The very existence of British agriculture is at stake if it cannot sustain the competition which threatens it. And if it can be shewn that the success of this competition is due, in great measure, to artificial restrictions which impede our farming enterprise, an urgent case will have been made out for their immediate reform.

Can the pro-
duce of the
United
Kingdom be
increased?

It has been said that the energy of the British Farmer has made Great Britain the most productive wheat soil in the world. Nevertheless the Earl of Leicester, a Peer both Liberal in his politics and liberal to his tenantry, and at the same time one of the highest agricultural authorities in the kingdom, has declared that the produce of this country might almost be doubled. It is a remarkable fact that while England has a population of only 300 per square mile and imports food, Guernsey and Jersey contrive to maintain a population, with presumably as large appetites, of 1,200 per square mile, and export food into the bargain! If, however, it be said that these islands are superior to the rest of England in natural fertility, let us take for comparison Jersey and the Isle of Wight, which enjoy very similar conditions. The acreage of the Isle of Wight is some 84,000 acres; its population 56,000; it imports a large proportion of its food. The acreage of Jersey is one-third that of the Isle of Wight; its population is the same, yet it exports 55,000 tons of produce annually.

What is the cause of this astounding contrast? It is plain that Jersey stands in no hazard of the competition to which the Isle of Wight is exposed. Why is it that the Isle of Wight farmer cannot, like the Jersey man, defy the American producer? The cost of carriage from the American farm to the home market amounts to between 14s. 6d. and 15s. per quarter. This is a natural protection to us of 35 per cent., which is not likely to be lowered, for, in the older States of the Union, the land is already exhausted, there is not yet sufficient accumulated capital for indulgence in high farming, and there is a rapid growth of domestic consumption. With this protection, more than equivalent to the average rent of the wheat growing land of this country, the British Farmer might meet

competition, and, if the authority of Lord Leicester be as good as it is generally taken to be, become a rich man into the bargain. The fact is that his difficulties arise from a cause which, summarised under a comprehensive term, implies an infinity of evils—to which the Isle of Wight with the rest of Great Britain is subject, and from which Jersey is free—the English land system.

The land system, as it should be if it were capable of being carried out in perfection, has been well described by Mr. G. S. Lefevre, the Liberal member for Reading. He says :* “The ideal of the English system of large proprietors and of tenants hiring the land they farm in lieu of owning it, is where the Landlord, being a capitalist, is able to relieve the Tenant of all expenditure of a permanent character, and to leave him the full employment of his capital in his trade of farming, in stocking and cultivating the land. This ideal involves a considerable expenditure on the part of the Landlord in building farm houses, in draining and other permanent improvements, and in building labourers’ cottages. If these functions are performed by the Landlord; if he has the capital and does what is recognised as a duty, nothing can be better from an economic point of view than the condition of the property, and the relation of Landlord, Tenant, and Labourer. . . . *The whole system, however, depends upon the owner of the property being able to provide the capital for permanent improvements, such as buildings, drains, and labourers’ cottages. If this capital be not forthcoming the system breaks down at its central point, on which the economic success of the whole system hinges. If the Landlord cannot provide the necessary capital for permanent improvement no one else will do so. The farming Tenant cannot be expected to do so upon any length of lease which is ordinarily given to him.*” Now it is a recognised fact that the Landlords of this country cannot provide the needful capital. The law, as it stands, enables individuals to accumulate vast aggregations of land, so that 4,500 persons own one-half of England and about seventy one-half of Scotland. But these Landlords are not real owners. They enjoy but a life interest in the estate, which, with or without their will, goes upon their death to their eldest sons. The less capital, therefore, that they expend upon the land the more they have for their younger children, who are also provided for by charges out of the estate. Two or three generations of these charges are sufficient to paralyse even the largest proprietors. In the debate in the House of Commons upon Mr. Chaplin’s motion with regard to agricultural distress, of which more will be said presently, Mr. R. W. Duff, the Liberal member for Banffshire, gave a good example of the hardship thus worked upon the Farmers. “Take the case,” he said, “so often referred to,

The real cause of the Farmer’s difficulties.

The Land Laws and the Farmer’s troubles.

* “Freedom of Land.” By G. Shaw Lefevre, M.P. 1880.

of a limited owner with an encumbered estate and a large family. If a Tenant asks for repairs, his Landlord tells him, 'I have done enough for my next heir; you must just work away as best you can.' Hence the tumble-down buildings, the undrained fields, and the miserable hovels for labourers, which have brought discredit on so many entailed properties." As for the heirs, the eldest sons, the certainty of their future exposes them in youth to the solicitations of money-lenders, and they frequently succeed to their property already crippled by debt. The following is an example of a state of things by no means uncommon among the landowners: "A property of 16,000 acres, with a rental of as many pounds, was settled upon the Earl of — for life, with remainder to his son, Lord —, as tenant in tail. Upon the coming of age of Lord — the estate was re-settled. In consideration of an annuity of £1,500 per annum the son agreed to join in the settlement, and to assent to charges which brought up the total encumbrance to £11,500 per annum, leaving a margin of £4,500, out of which the son was to receive £1,500 during his father's life-time. The son gave up his reversion in tail and took a life interest in succession to his father, with remainder in tail to his own issue. Within a year from the re-settlement the son, having run into debt for a few thousands, was made bankrupt; the whole of his reversionary life interest was then assigned to the creditors, and *the result is that during the lives of father and son and perhaps for many years after, this great estate will be in the position of being in the ostensible possession of men absolutely without means and without any motive or probably power to sell.*"* This being a not uncommon state of things it is not surprising to hear of a case quoted by Mr. W. Fowler, formerly M.P. for Cambridge.† "A property in Sussex was purchased in 1810 for £50,000 and placed in strict settlement. So it remained until 1850, when it had become so reduced in condition through neglect that it was sold to the present owner for £25,000. He, being a man of capital and enterprise, has so improved it, that recently he was offered £75,000 for the same estate." This explains how it is that, as was given in evidence before a Committee of the House of Lords in 1870 by Mr. Bailey Denton, out of 20,000,000 acres requiring drainage only 3,000,000 had been properly drained. Mr. Mechi bears similar testimony, that millions of acres require an expenditure of from £20 to £36 per acre. The public dissatisfaction with this state of things has at last become sufficiently pronounced to compel the introduction of a Bill for its amelioration. But the Conservative Government, naturally indisposed to extensive change, has endeavoured in its measure

The Land Laws
and the
Farmer's
troubles.

The Land Laws
and the Far-
mer's troubles.
How the
Conservatives
and Liberals
propose to deal
with them.

* "Limitation of Entails and Settlements." By G. Shaw Lefevre, M.P. 1877.

† "Aspect of the Land Question." W. Fowler, M.P.

to retain the system of limited ownership. The owner, therefore, while he has some facilities for undertaking improvements, should he care to do so, has no more motive for action than before, and it is needless to say, is put under no compulsion to sell. On these grounds the Government Bill is strongly opposed by the Liberal Peers, Lords Morley, Ripon, and Carington, the last of whom has emphatically denounced the injury to Landlord and Tenant which the prevailing system inflicts. Whatever legal shape the reform of the Land Laws may take, Liberals like the Marquis of Hartington, the Marquis of Tavistock, Earl Cowper, Mr. Forster, and Mr. Gladstone, are generally agreed that the embarrassed owner who cannot do justice to his property must be set loose from his trammels that the land may pass freely to more solvent proprietors.

"Free Trade in Land" is now the first article of reform promised by the Liberals, alike for the sake of the Landlords, the Tenants and the public. Mr. Gladstone was only pronouncing the opinion of the Farmers and of the Liberal party, when he declared in the course of his speeches in Midlothian that "the present law of entail was one of the most serious restraints upon the effective prosecution of the agriculture of the country." Yet the Conservatives, fearing to diminish the political influence of the Landlords, are determined, in substance, to retain it as it is. In this matter, at any rate, the Farmer will have no difficulty in seeing with which party his interests are identified.

If capital, then, is so urgently needed for the soil, why, it may be asked, do not those enterprising capitalists, the Tenant Farmers, contribute it? The answer to this, if it were not so familiar, would be incredible. The law, in effect, prohibits it. Whereas it might have been expected that every allurements would be offered to capital; yet in consequence of the utter insecurity of investment in agriculture "the best authorities are of opinion that capital is being rapidly withdrawn."* Nor is this to be wondered at. Three-fourths of the land of England is held upon yearly tenancy, with six months' notice to quit, at the expiration of which the Landlord enjoys the legal right of appropriating the Tenant's capital invested in the soil. In this way a positive inducement is held out to the Tenant to put as little into the land, and to take as much out as possible; and it is notorious that this is the effect of the system. Those who oppose any change in the condition of the Tenant in this respect, urge that Tenants from year to year are better off than the leaseholders, in so far as they are less liable to have their rents advanced. But why is this? Simply because the Tenant from year to year, having no security whatever for his capital, cannot and

The Law gives the Farmer no security for his capital.

* "The Relations of Landlord and Tenant in England and Scotland," p. 100, By W. E. Bear. 1876. Printed for the Cobden Club.

will not imperil it. It is his interest to keep his farm poor, and to incur no expenditure that will not be followed by quick returns. This injustice to the Farmer works injury to the public. Mr. Wren Hoskyns, formerly Liberal member for Oxfordshire, and an untiring exponent of Farmers' grievances, aptly summarised the present system as a "game of beggar-my-neighbour between Tenant for life, and Tenant at six months' notice, each trying to strip the land by least investment in it."* The Farmers are hampered, their land rendered less productive, and English money is driven abroad to buy food, which could be profitably grown at home.

Eviction.

That the apprehensions of the Farmer lest his capital should be confiscated are not groundless has been shewn in some very startling instances. In 1872, the late Mr. George Hope, of Fenton Barns, in Scotland, an agriculturist whose farming was reputed the most skilful in the United Kingdom, that is, in the world, and whose family had been Tenants for upwards of a century upon the same estate, suddenly received notice to quit. He had presumed to differ in political opinion from a Conservative Landlord, the Hon. Nesbit Hamilton, who, on the same grounds and at the same time, evicted another Tenant, Mr. Sadler, of Ferrygate, of whom, together with Mr. Hope, no less an authority than Mr. James Howard pronounced "they are the most enterprising Farmers of my acquaintance." The whole of the large capital which they had invested in his land their Landlord irredeemably confiscated. It is only fair to Mr. Hamilton to add that, when in Parliament, in 1849, he had been one of the most outspoken opponents of a measure introduced by Mr. Pusey, the Liberal member for Berkshire, establishing the principle of Tenant-Right. Other well-known examples have occurred since the case of Mr. Hope. The Earl of Darnley, a nobleman of extreme Conservative opinions, thought fit, in 1876, to evict a gentleman, who was admittedly one of his best Farmers, for the same crime of entertaining political opinions of his own. For no crime at all, but apparently from mere caprice, Mr. Richard Foxton, Tenant of Welburn, near Kirby Moorside, North Yorkshire, was, in April, 1879, after an occupation by his family of three hundred years, evicted from his holding. The occupation had, of course, been on a yearly agreement, with six months' notice. The Tenant, confiding in the probity of his Landlord, had erected farm buildings, drained and enclosed bogs, built bridges, planted trees, and executed other permanent and valuable improvements, to the amount of £3,000. He had been assured by the former owners of the farm that he would never have to leave it; and he relied on that assurance. The farm was thrown into Chancery, and bought by a neighbouring proprietor. The Tenant received notice to quit from the

* "Catechism of the English Land System." By W. Hoskyns, M.P.

new Landlord, and was turned adrift without compensation or appeal.

Against tyranny of this sort, whether prompted by politics, temper, or avarice, the Liberal party, which, by the Reform Bill, first gave Tenant-Farmers paying a rent of £50 the right to vote, has always protested. The right to vote, however, leaving the Farmer, as it did, unprotected against political coercion, was only an additional temptation to despotic Landlords to refuse leases, in order to retain the Farmers in dependence upon them. The Liberal party, therefore, again coming to the Farmers' assistance, and, in spite of the strenuous opposition of the Conservatives, who avowed themselves desirous of supporting the Landlords' "influence," passed the Ballot Act, and the Farmer became at last free to vote as he pleased. It is a noticeable consequence of the Ballot, and of the independence which it has conferred on the Farmer, that since its introduction the Farmers have felt strong enough to agitate for Tenant-Right on their own account instead of supinely acquiescing in the efforts made from time to time in their behalf by Liberal Landlords in Parliament.

The Liberals
and the
Farmers

But it is not only the appropriation of his capital by eviction that the Farmer has to fear. It is well-known that when the rents of yearly Tenants are raised they are generally raised in respect of the improvements effected by themselves, and the consequent augmented value of their holding. Mr. C. S. Read, M.P. (the Tenant-Farmers' representative in the House of Commons), in a speech delivered at Harleston, gave an account of an estate in Norfolk on which the rents of all the Tenants whose land was in good heart were put up at Michaelmas, 1878, from 10 to 15 per cent, while the Tenant of one farm in an exceedingly foul condition, without being told the valuation which had been put upon it, was invited to bid, and the bid, though below his then rent, was accepted. Facts like this may well dishearten Farmers and drive both them and their capital from the land. It is an intolerable wrong that an investor in a business should not be allowed to make the best of his investment, provided he thereby inflict no injury upon the property of others. And it is insult as well as injury that he should be compelled to purchase the safety of that investment by political subserviency or by cultivating the goodwill of the agent and the gamekeeper. Yet, even though he succeed in preserving his capital during his life, his unexpected death involves its loss, absolutely without compensation, and the ruin of his family is the greater in proportion to the services which, as a Farmer, he has rendered by his outlay to the community. A mass of more outrageous injustices never was heaped upon any body of long-suffering men, and but that the Farmers have trusted as their friends those whose political principles involve its retention, the remedy would long since have been applied.

Insecurity of
the Farmer's
outlay.

Tenant-Right.
The remedy.

The Conserv-
atives and
Tenant-Right.

What is this remedy? Simply an equitable principle of Tenant-Right. When in July last, in the debate which took place upon Mr. Chaplin's motion, the Liberals alleged that what was wanted was not so much a commission of inquiry as an immediate redress of Farmers' wrongs, Sir Stafford Northcote, the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke of these allegations as "extraordinary statements, and likely to make a mischievous impression." The Government, therefore, after deceiving the Farmers in 1875 with professions of an intention to remedy their grievances by the Agricultural Holdings Act, in 1879 turn round and attack the Liberal complaints of the Farmers' wrongs as "extraordinary" and "mischievous." On that occasion Mr. J. W. Barclay, the Liberal member for Forfarshire, "as one of the few Tenant-Farmers in the House, and, he presumed, one of those mischievous agitators to whom the right hon. gentleman, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had been good enough to allude," protested in behalf of the Tenant-Farmers, and *intimated that the inquiry which the Government was willing to grant, but which had been previously refused to a Liberal member, was intended to stave off the just grievances of the Farmers.*

Tenant-Right,
a just claim.

The Tenant-Right which the Farmers demand is a simple act of justice. Payment for value received by the Landlord is the just principle of compensation for the Farmer's unexhausted improvements. The Tenant should be "paid the unexhausted value of his outlay, if that has added to the letting value of the holding, whether or not he has derived profit from the investment." Mr. James Howard (late Liberal member for Bedford) once observed that "by judicious means a Tenant might often add to the value of an estate much more than the amount of the outlay upon his improvements. For instance, a well known agriculturist in Worcestershire, at small cost, embanked a meadow for a short distance at a particular point, which raised the value of a considerable number of acres." "On broad principles," he added, "I think the Tenant has just as righteous a claim to be paid for the exercise of his skill in raising the value of an estate as for the outlay of his money." Owing, however, to practical difficulties in the way of valuations on this principle and to the opposition which it was sure to excite, the "Landlord and Tenant Bill," which was a moderate, though effective, provision for Tenant Right, introduced by Mr. James Howard, adopted the Tenant's pecuniary outlay as the standard by which to calculate his claims upon the Landlord. Besides this, the Tenant has plainly a just claim to appropriate all the return upon his speculative outlay during his tenancy, because, should the investment prove unremunerative, he alone and not the Landlord, will be liable to bear the loss. The case is precisely analogous to any other investment of capital. "A capitalist lends a man of business a thousand pounds on

Denial of
Tenant-Right
the first
Farmers'
grievance.

good security, and at a fair rate of interest. The man of business uses that sum profitably in his investments and thus adds to it, besides paying interest upon it regularly. When the loan is returned, is the capitalist entitled to claim the increment, or any part of it, as well as the original sum lent?" Certainly not. "The loss of a bad investment falls entirely—and justly—on the investor, and conversely, the whole profit of a good investment should be his."*

The opponents of Tenant-Right sometimes maintain that, in the case of long leases, improving Tenants enjoy adequate security. This may be true when the leases are "farmed out." But, in the first place, as has been seen, the majority of tenancies are not on long leases; in the second, they are not by any means always "farmed out;" and thirdly, the process of "farming out," as it diminishes the productiveness of the soil, thereby injures the community, who are compelled to purchase abroad sufficient to supply this artificial deficiency. Mr. Hope, speaking of the Lincolnshire custom of Tenant-Right, by which the Farmers under agreements to quit are paid for their improvements in draining, marling, and manuring, remarks, "It is this Lincolnshire custom which I, and Scotch farmers generally, want to see added to leases for periods of 19 or 21 years, *being sure it would have the effect of adding one-third to the crops of the kingdom in a very few years.*"† If even long leases, therefore, are, by themselves, insufficient to induce the application of capital, still more are low rents. There is but one magnet by which capital can be attracted, and that is security, which is at present withheld.

Seeing, then, that the present absence of Tenant-Right is not only a grievance to the Farmer but, on first-rate authority, inflicts an unnecessary loss of more than 33 per cent. of its food consumption upon the community, it remains to be seen how it has been dealt with by the Conservatives and Liberals respectively.

It was first recognised as coming to the front among public questions of prime importance by a Liberal Peer, Lord Portman, in 1841, whose Bill gave "power to a Tenant, whether holding from year to year or under a lease, to charge his Landlord with the unexhausted value of any permanent improvements which he had executed, after having given notice of his intention to execute them, with the consent or silent assent of the Landlord. The amount due was to be settled by arbitration. The Bill further gave power to the landowner to charge his estate with the amount paid for compensation." This Bill being dropped in the House of Lords, a Liberal member of Parliament, Mr. Pusey, in 1847 brought in his Bill for Compulsory Tenant-Right, of which

Parliament
and Tenant-
Right.

* "Relations of Landlord and Tenant in England and Scotland." By W. E. Bear, p. 86.

† *Times*, December 30, 1874.

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and Tenant-
Right.

Mr. Howard's
Bill for
Tenant-Right.

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Mr. James Howard has said : "I believe that no more honest measure was ever proposed to the British House of Commons. It held the balance fairly between Landlord and Tenant ; it gave the latter an indefeasible right to his improvements, whilst it secured the interests of the owner." This Bill did not then pass, but in 1848 a Committee was appointed to take evidence upon the question, of which Mr. Pusey was chairman. The evidence was for the most part "in favour not only of legislation, but of compulsory legislation, in order to secure the capital of Tenant-Farmers." This measure failed at the time, but in 1850, under a *Liberal Government*, it passed the House of Commons with a Liberal majority and was thrown out by the Conservative majority of the House of Lords. In 1873 Mr. Howard, a Liberal, and Mr. Read, who was originally elected to Parliament as a Tenant-Farmer independent of politics, brought in their Landlord and Tenant Bill. This Bill, which was for compulsory compensation, met with determined opposition from the Conservatives. Lord Eleho, a Conservative, led the attack upon it with the resolution that "this House is not prepared to prohibit freedom of contract in England between Landlord and Tenant," as if that were a free contract which one of the parties enters upon with a multitude of legal presumptions in his favour. In the course of the debate, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, a Liberal, significantly remarked that "he thought it was proper that the country should learn the opinions of the great Conservative party upon the question of Tenant Right." Viscount Royston admitted that "he had heard of no opinions on his" (*viz.*, the Conservative) "*side of the House in favour of the Bill, as it stood (i.e., with the compulsory clauses).*" On the other hand, Mr. Wren Hoskyns, the Liberal member for Oxfordshire, "thought the withdrawal of the Bill was one of the greatest calamities of the Session. A discussion upon it would have shewn who were the true friends of the Farmers in that House."

The Agricultural Holdings Act, 1875, at length made this disclosure unmistakably. It was an ingenious contrivance for pacifying the Farmers, and at the same time retaining those unjust privileges cherished by the Conservative majority of the landowners. It is not necessary to enter upon a detailed criticism of an Act which, though it remains upon the Statute Book, was from the first, as it was intended to be, a dead letter. In any case it was unsatisfactory, for it was full of vexatious restrictions upon the Tenants and of unfair presumptions in favour of the Landlords. Finally, it adopted the principle which has always been contended for by the Conservatives, that though compensation may be enacted the Landlord should not be compelled to grant it. The Bill, in a word, made compensation permissive and not compulsory. It is well that Farmers should be presented with the opinions of men of their own class with reference to this measure of the "Farmers' friends." Inquiries have been made by the

Mark Lane Express among the Farmers in all parts of England as to their opinion of the Act. The answers shewed in the first place that, with exceedingly few exceptions, the Landlords, as the Liberals had prognosticated, had availed themselves of the permissive character of the Act and contracted themselves out of its provisions. As to the intrinsic merits of the Act, there was, among the Farmers, one general drift of opinion, summarised in the reply, "It was so obviously a Landlords' measure." "The Tenants' opinion is that it is more a Landlords' Act than a Tenants'," is another answer; while a third Farmer, who has plainly made up his mind as to the "Farmer's friends," at last says, "*My candid opinion has been that the Act is the greatest insult to the British Farmer that has ever been produced, and I think they will find it so.*"

Now, since this is the opinion of Farmers upon a measure professedly introduced in their interest by the Conservative Government, and since Farmers, like other people, sometimes have short memories, it is as well to remind them what line the Liberal party took in the House of Commons at the time the Bill was debated. *The Liberals, from the beginning to the end of the debate, demanded, as Mr. Pusey, Mr. Howard, and Lord Portman had done, that compensation to the Farmers should be compulsory on the Landlord.* Thus, after the Premier's speech Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen, the Liberal member for Sandwich, "put it to the House that freedom of contract . . . did not at this moment really exist in the hiring of land. Freedom there certainly was on the side of the Landlord, but the only freedom which the Farmer had was the freedom to decline the contract if he did not like the Landlord's conditions. Yes, but that was not freedom in contract—it was freedom to avoid entering into any contract at all. What he called freedom of contract was freedom on both sides." After reference to legislative interference with freedom of contract in the case of the Merchant Shipping Bill and the Truck Act, "he put it to the landowners and country gentlemen" (i.e., the Conservative party generally) "whether it was quite honest and consistent to join in this interference with the manufacturers and then, when it became a question of aiding the Tenant-Farmers . . . to turn round and declare against the wickedness of interfering with freedom of contract. . . He spoke as a landowner . . . but he believed that a compulsory enactment upon the question, based upon clear and sound principles, would work the very reverse of injury. Her Majesty's Ministers might have desired to appear again on the political stage as 'the Farmers' friends,' but if they had nothing better than this Bill to give to the Tenant-Farmers of England, he believed that they would appear in that character, as the playbills said, 'positively for the last time.' The duty and interest of landowners alike dictated

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that they should ascertain without delay what it was that justice demanded should be given to the Tenant-Farmers; what it was that was demanded by the interest of the State in the development of the productive powers of the land, and having ascertained this, that *they should give it freely, give it outright, and not permit any one Tenant to be deprived of it by the caprice of any one Landlord, sheltering himself behind the specious plea of freedom of contract.*"

The Conserv-
atives and
Tenant-Right.

To this plea, by a real Farmers' friend, in their behalf, what was said by the Conservatives? Why, Mr. Chaplin, whom the Farmers of Mid-Lincolnshire return as their representative, an eminent Conservative, said: "*He believed the necessity for legislation was not so great or so urgent as had been represented. The public feeling in its favour had been very much overstated. There were beyond doubt many districts and some counties in England where nothing of the kind was required. As regarded the 42nd Clause, extending the notice to quit, he confessed this was a matter on which he had always held a most decided opinion. He objected altogether to extending the notice to quit from six months to twelve months.*"

Mr. Lowe, the late Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the other hand, "thought it would be eminently unfair to pass a Bill stating that in the opinion of Parliament such and such a thing ought to be done without Parliament taking upon itself the responsibility of making it compulsory."

To this Mr. Pell, Conservative member for South Leicestershire, that is, a Farmers' representative, replied that "compulsion would not do."

After further debate, Sir George Campbell, Liberal member for Kirkcaldy, moved as an amendment: "That the relations of Landlord and Tenant will not be put on a satisfactory footing by any measure which does not make it obligatory on Landlords to give sufficient security to Tenants, either in the shape of a right to compensation for capital sunk in the soil, to be paid in the event of a determination of the tenancy, or by a lease of sufficient duration." He added that "although the confiscation of Tenants' property was not the rule, yet the very liability to the exception constituted a state of insecurity which was a great and real grievance, and which Government had admitted the necessity of trying to remedy. *The dependent condition of the Tenant-Farmer was a social and political evil which ought to be removed.*" Sir Thomas Acland, member for North Devon, and one of the few Liberals whom the Tenant-Farmers of England return to Parliament, himself the owner of 36,586 acres in England, similarly supported the Farmers' interests against the Government. "He believed that Lord Portman in the year 1842 introduced Bills in the House of Lords on the subject, but being opposed by country gentlemen and hereditary Peers" (the large majority of whom, be it remembered, are Conservatives), "he had to abandon his attempt to do justice to the Tenant-Farmers of the country."

After further observations, among which should be mentioned that of Mr. Newdegate, the Conservative member for North Warwickshire, that the Bill's "second merit is that it is permissive," Sir Walter Barttelot, the representative of the Farmers of West Sussex, and on agricultural topics one of the leaders of the Conservative side of the House of Commons, like Mr. Chaplin upon a later occasion, to which attention will presently be called, sneered at Farmers' grievances altogether. "They knew that throughout the length and breadth of the land Agricultural Chambers had risen up and demanded that there should be some legislation. But he was not absolutely clear that Agricultural Chambers represented the views and wishes of the Tenant-Farmers of this country. What he wanted was that the Bill should respect, as the measure of a Conservative Government ought to respect, the rights of private property" (*i.e.*, of course, the privileges enjoyed by the Landlord at the expense of the Farmer). After these outspoken expressions of opinion from their supporters it is not to be wondered at that the Government declined to adopt the principle of compulsory compensation. At a comparatively recent date, July 4th, 1879, upon the occasion of the debate arising upon Mr. Chaplin's motion for an address on agricultural distress, Mr. Chaplin himself commented upon the complaints of the Farmers, as drawn up by the Farmers' Alliance. This is how he treated the question of Tenant-Right. As to the alleged insecurity of the Farmers' capital, he said: "What are the facts of the case? I declare I really do not know one single well-managed estate where security is wanting," and he then went on to tell the Farmers, "*There is no one to blame but themselves.*" Mr. Thomas Brassey, the Liberal member for Hastings, rising to second Mr. Chaplin's motion, observed that "it was earnestly to be desired that the great agricultural interest should be assured that they had friends on both sides of the House." What sort of friends the Conservatives were shewing themselves on the subject of Farmers' grievances we have already seen. But the Liberals, once again, approached this matter in a very different spirit. Mr. Brassey, after entering at some detail into the depression of agriculture, pointed out that what the Farmers are now agreed upon is true, *viz.*, that the restricted powers of limited owners, and the settlement of land upon unborn children were the first causes of the embarrassments of owners of property, and consequently of the inferior condition of much of the land of the country. He reminded the House that "in the speech in which he moved for a committee of inquiry in 1845, Mr. Cobden" (the celebrated Liberal statesman) "*stated that the primary cause of the distressed condition of agriculture was the deficiency of capital in the hands of the Farmers. That deficiency he attributed to insecurity of tenure.*" Yet Mr. Chaplin, the Farmers' representative, still, in 1879, refuses to admit this! Later in the

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Tenant-Right.

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debate Mr. John Bright, whom it is scarcely necessary to describe as a Liberal, roundly took the Conservative majority to task for the indifference they exhibited towards the Farmers' grievances. "*I never hear you*" (Conservatives) "*utter a word in favour of those things which your Tenants are asking Parliament to grant them. You have no remedy and you have no suggestion. If I had four hundred Tenant-Farmers before me, and asked the question of them, what would they say? They would say it was necessary to give them security for their expenditure in improvements, which your resistance would not allow to pass the House.*" The moment the emasculated Bill passed the House, from the highest to the lowest of you, the first thing you did was to get rid of the little that was left of the Bill."

In spite, then, of the denials of the Conservatives, the Liberals are persuaded that the Tenant-Farmers are suffering under a grievance which demands redress. Mr. Goschen and other Liberal leaders have announced that, in the event of a Liberal return to power, the question of Tenant-Right shall receive a just settlement. By this time, at any rate, the Farmers must realise that in this matter they have nothing to hope from the present Government. It is within their power at this election to prove to their Conservative "friends" that they are intelligent enough to know when they are enduring a wrong, and that experience has at length taught them to which party they must look for substantial and not delusive remedy.

Another grievance which is oppressive to the Tenant-Farmer, and one not altogether unconnected with the denial of Tenant-Right and of Leases, is the Law of Distraint or Distress. By this law, as is well known, the Landlord is permitted a security for his debt in priority to other creditors. It is one of the causes of the infrequency of leases, because the certainty of recovering their rents, if in arrear, induces Landlords to take as Tenants men whom they would be unwilling to trust with leases. It also has a tendency to raise the Landlord's rent above its natural level, since a speculative, reckless, and insolvent Farmer will often outbid men who are at the same time more prudent and more substantial. It further enables a needy, grasping Landlord to squeeze a good and improving Tenant by threatening to take an adventurer in his place and thus burden him with the expense and loss which accompanies a change of holding. The Tenant is besides a loser by the fact that the system impairs his credit, since no one is willing to advance capital without some sort of security, and the Law of Distress leaves the Tenant comparatively little to offer. Moreover, the privilege thus accorded to the Landlord is both an infringement of that freedom of contract which the Conservatives invoke when they refuse the Farmer a compulsory Tenant-Right, and opposed to that free trade in land which the Liberal Party desires to establish. Contracts should,

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Interest?

The second
Farmer's
grievance—
Distraint.

so far as is possible, be put by the law upon an equal footing, and there is no reason in the nature of things why a Landlord's contract with his Tenant should be specially privileged. If the Landlord desires security for his rent, he can obtain it by a contract on the same terms as other creditors can obtain security for their advances. Again, the present system is exceptionally unjust in this respect—that the Landlord not merely secures his debt, but also the benefit of any improvements which, at the expense of other creditors, the holding has received. He thus pockets not only his own money but their's as well. And while this wrong is inflicted upon individuals, the public also suffer; for where the Landlord has, by the peculiar advantages which the right of Distress confers on him, been tempted to take Tenants without capital adequate to the holding, the land is rendered less productive, and its deficiency in yield must, of course, be supplemented by foreign importations. In the long run, too, the Landlord is often but little the gainer, since, where land is exhausted through inadequate expenditure, rents must decline proportionately. The Law of Distress, therefore, is injurious to the Farmer and the public, while it confers no counterbalancing advantage upon the Landlord. What, then, is the attitude towards the question of the contending political parties? In England it has only recently begun to come to the front as a public question. But the very nearly corresponding Law of Hypothec in Scotland supplies us with a clue to the respective disposition of Liberals and Conservatives in regard to it. Mr. Gladstone, speaking at Dalkeith on the 26th November last, observed that “a certain number of Tories are returned as adverse to Hypothec from Scotland, knowing that their brother Tories in the other two countries will destroy the effect of their votes.” The fact is that the Farmers of Scotland are determined to be rid of Hypothec, and make willingness to vote for its abolition a condition of the election of their representatives. Mr. Vans Agnew, a Conservative, therefore brings in a Bill for its abolition year by year which is quietly dropped towards the end of the Session. Mr. Gladstone told the Farmers of Dalkeith that Mr. Vans Agnew's Bill was a “Tulchan Bill.” “You know,” he said, “what the Tulchan calf was. Why it was the figure of a calf stuffed with straw. The practice was to place the cow under the calf to induce the calf to give milk, and Lord Rosebery's idea is that the Bill of Mr. Agnew is the Tulchan calf. The cow is the Liberal party, or the Scotch Farmer, and the Tulchan Bill is placed near the Scotch Farmer, in order to induce him to give milk in the shape of votes for the Tory party.” In the course of the debates which arose on agricultural depression in July, 1879, and to which reference has already been made, the Conservatives never so much as suggested that the Law of Distress, like the absence of Tenant-Right, was a

Hypothec.

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cause of embarrassment to the Farmers. On the contrary, we have seen that both Sir Walter Barttelot and Mr. Chaplin, in behalf, we may suppose, of their farming constituents, ridiculed the notion of Farmers' grievances altogether. It was reserved for a Liberal member, in the case of the Law of Distress as in the case of Tenant-Right, to shew a genuine concern in the troubles of the Farmers. Viscount Maeduff, who has since succeeded to the earldom of Fife, "wished to remind the House that there had been, ever since he had had the honour of a seat in it, no lack of Bills introduced bearing upon Farmers' grievances. Had they found his honourable friend, the member for Mid-Lincolnshire" (Mr. Chaplin) "among the supporters of such measures, or *was it only when there was a chance of rents falling that agricultural grievances were to be aired?*" Speaking as a Scotch member, he might appeal to frequent endeavours to obtain a hearing for certain well-known questions, but on those occasions they had always been met by the strongest opposition from English county members, and had been told that their ideas were revolutionary or subversive. As an instance of this he might say that the Law of Hypothec had long been an open sore to the Farmers of Scotland, and so strong had been the feeling upon this subject that a Bill had been introduced for its abolition by a Conservative member during every Session of the present Parliament. *If hon. gentlemen sitting on the other side of the House*" (i.e., Conservatives) "*had really been anxious to place Farmers in a more advantageous position, surely that Bill would not have found such an united body of Conservative opponents arrayed against it.*" As a Scotchman he hardly liked to mention the question of the English Law of Distress; but he had noticed that it had formed the subject of discussion at several agricultural meetings, and he felt that he could not do better than respectfully recommend it to the champion of the English Farmer." Mr. John Bright, later in the debate, estimated the Conservative disposition in the same way. He said: "*I suppose hon. gentlemen opposite*" (the Conservatives) "*thought that the Bill for the Abolition of Hypothec looked a little towards something of the same kind in England, and therefore they were always willing to join in rejecting that measure.*" But the Liberals are not content with denouncing the Conservative hostility to reform in this particular. Mr. Goschen, in his election address, enumerates its abolition as among the measures which a Liberal Government intends to take in hand. The Earl of Fife, not satisfied with protesting against its continuance at a time when, as an eldest son, he had no immediate interest in the land, has, since he has become Landlord of over 257,000 acres, carried his Liberal principles into practice. By a rare exercise of magnanimity he has voluntarily renounced the unjust rights with which the law has clothed him, and by the 19th article of the leases which he has granted to his tenantry he surrenders "all

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of Distress.

preferable rights as against other creditors of the Tenant conferred upon him by the Law of Hypothec." If words are not sufficient to prove to the Farmers that it is to the Liberals that they must look for succour actions like this can at least not fail to do so!

The Game grievance also has a connection with the discouragement of capital. As Mr. Clare Sewell Road, the Tenant-Farmer member, has said, "A Landlord could now let his farm to a Tenant upon the usual covenants, and eat him up with Game without paying him the usual compensation. He could turn him out of his farm, and half ruin him with a six months' notice to quit by confiscating every shilling of his improvements." It has been estimated that something like £20,000,000 worth of agricultural produce is every year destroyed by Game. *This means £20,000,000 a year dead loss to the Farmers!* In one English county alone the Game is calculated to consume as much food as would maintain 40,000 sheep. Mr. P. A. Taylor, the Liberal member for Leicester, in his motion of the 3rd March of this year for the abolition of the Game Laws, said in the House of Commons: "From Leicestershire a gentleman had testified to damage being sometimes done to the extent of £12 or £13 an acre, and Mr. Hewitt, of the Sussex Chamber of Agriculture, had placed it upon record that the *damage done by rabbits in some localities sometimes amounted to £25 per diem.* It was said that a Farmer could get compensation if he could prove the damage, but a person who was well acquainted with the matter said he never knew a Farmer who got one-half of the compensation he was entitled to. A Warwickshire Farmer, a Tenant of an hon. member of the House, whose name he would not mention, wrote to him that, having no clause in his lease against the preservation of Game, he was nearly ruined by rabbits, and he threatened proceedings. Eventually his Landlord gave him a promise in writing that if he would not interfere 2s. per acre would be deducted from his rent." It is as well that the Tenant-Farmers should reflect that Warwickshire at the last election returned four Conservatives to Parliament!

The third
Farmers'
grievance—
Game.

Ravages of
Game.

The Game nuisance, as it at present exists, is unquestionably a substantial grievance to the Farmer. "Thick, irregular hedgerows, which are a hindrance to agriculture, are preserved because they harbour Game."* Mr. P. A. Taylor did not exaggerate when he said: "The Game Laws are entirely incompatible with high farming, and he had it on the highest authority that the two occupations of Game preserver and improver of land could not possibly be followed by the same man on the same estate." Indeed, it is plain that no capitalist can risk his money in an investment which may very possibly be consumed before his eyes. The Game Laws, therefore, as they stand, co-operate with the causes which

* "Free Land." By Arthur Arnold (Liberal Candidate for Salford), p. 57.

have been already dealt with to depress British agriculture by scaring away the capital of which it stands in eminent need.

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and the Game
grievance.

What is it, then, that the Farmer wants? Not the, abolition of the Game Laws, which would probably involve the total disappearance of Game. He asks simply, as Mr. Barclay, the Liberal member for Forfarshire, puts it, "to have the indefeasible right by his own hands, or by those whom he authorises to do so, to protect his crops from the ground Game." The British Farmer likes a day's sport as well as any man, and such a measure, far from annihilating hares and rabbits, would serve to check their numbers just so much as the interests of farming demanded. But the right must be "indefeasible." Permissive legislation in regard to Game has proved a failure as complete as that dealing with Tenant-Right. "The Game by law has long belonged to the occupier in England, but his right to kill it is, on the great majority of estates, taken from him by means of the overwhelming power which Landlords exercise over the terms of private contract."* As to winged Game, which does very little harm to the crops, Farmers would be perfectly willing to reserve to their Landlords the right of shooting. By an Act of Parliament to this effect, which would amount to an equitable compromise, an injury would be redressed which, while it mulets the Farmer and the public to the sum of £20,000,000 per annum, is accompanied by no corresponding benefit to the Landlord.

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tives and the
Game
grievance.

This grievance then being so intolerable and the Farmers' demands for redress so moderate, what is the attitude towards it of the Liberals and Conservatives respectively? It has been seen that there are some few Liberals who go so far as to propose the abolition of the Game Laws altogether. At any rate there is a pretty unanimous agreement among the Liberals that some moderate reform such as that above indicated would be a simple measure of justice which the Farmer has a right to ask. Bills to that effect have been over and over again introduced into Parliament by Liberals and thrown out by Conservative majorities. At the present moment the Conservatives in the House of Commons are as hostile to an improvement of the condition of the Farmer in this respect as ever. The Game grievance, like the Tenant-Right grievance and the Distress grievance, is a pure delusion! According to the Conservatives no grievance of the kind exists! On the 2nd March of this year Mr. Chaplin, who, it is as well to remind Farmers, over and over again, has been elected by them to represent their interests in Mid-Lincolnshire, said in the House of Commons: "*The fact was, the Game Laws were not a practical grievance of the Farmers.*" Sir Walter Barttelot, another Conservative Tenant-Farmers' representative, and

* "Relations of Landlord and Tenant." By W. E. Bear,

who, as has been seen, makes light of Farmers' grievances, moved: "That it is not now expedient to deal with the question of the Game Laws." The hon. member might have added, "Nor ever will be until Farmers are so impoverished by hares and rabbits that they find a difficulty in paying their rent." Sir W. Barttelot was seconded by Earl Percy, eldest son of a Conservative Duke, and who is supposed to represent the Tenant-Farmers of Northumberland. The Liberal member for the City of Oxford, Sir William Harcourt, justly said: "There could be no mistake about the amendment of the hon. member for Sussex" (Sir W. Barttelot), "which was seconded by the noble Lord the member for Northumberland. The principle of the amendment was 'No surrender.' The amendment raised the issue in the plainest form. They would have no alteration in the Game Laws. That was the direct issue. He had been curious to see what line the 'Farmers' friends' would take upon that issue in England and Scotland." The Conservatives, however, carried the day by a majority of 73, and the hares and rabbits are for the present free to pursue their depredations upon the British Farmer. This was not the first occasion that the subject of Game disclosed the hostility of Conservative members to the Farmers' interests. When the debate on agricultural depression, from which extracts have already been taken, was proceeding Mr. Chaplin flung defiance at the Farmers' plea for consideration in the matter of Game, as he had done at their call for Tenant-Right. "As to the Game Laws and their reformation," he said, "*I cannot for a moment accept the view that the Game Laws are in any way responsible for the present distress in the agricultural parts of the country, for it is perfectly well-known that those laws have existed for years in good as well as in bad times. The same remark applies to the other points in the programme of the Farmers' Alliance.*" Mr. John Bright was justified by language like this when, addressing the Conservatives upon the same occasion, he said: "If anybody brings in a Bill to protect Farmers from the ravages of Game, or to diminish the inducements to preserve it, hon. gentlemen opposite" (the Conservatives) "will come down in numbers, which they could not exceed even if the Constitution were at stake, to expel such an odious measure from the floor of Parliament." Once again let the Farmers ask themselves which of the two parties really represents their interests in this question of Game. Is it true that to have one's property consumed to the extent of £20,000,000 per annum by creatures whose existence yields pleasure and profit only to another is, as Mr. Chaplin and the Conservatives assert, no "practical grievance?" If it is no grievance, if the Farmers are content that things should in this respect remain as they are, then let them return Conservatives to Parliament, for they may rest assured that until a Liberal Government attains power the great Game plague will never

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be alleviated. This, like the other Farmers' grievances, does not really call for a remedy which would be to the injury of the Landlord. Many Landlords, especially Liberal Landlords, like the Earl of Fife, are far-seeing enough to appreciate the fact that with improved farming rents will naturally rise, and that in this, as in other matters, the genuine interests of Landlord and Tenant are identical. Lord Fife in the fifth clause of his lease gives his Tenants both a right to kill ground Game and even a claim to compensation for damage to crops by Game into the bargain. What the Farmers ask is less than what a Liberal Landlord spontaneously grants, yet the Conservatives in Parliament refuse the smallest concession and deny the grievance!

The fourth
Farmers'
grievance.—
Local Govern-
ment and
Rates.

The Liberals
and Local
Government.

The three crying evils under which the Farmer suffers have now been dealt with, but they do not entirely exhaust the catalogue of his difficulties. The question of Local Government and the cognate question of the incidence of Rates urgently need solution. Mr. Gladstone's Administration took the first step in this matter as long ago as 1871. The injury to the Farmer is not simply the bewildering complication of authorities under which he lives, though it is bad enough to be governed at the same time upon different principles by a Vestry, a School Board, a Highway Board, a Burial Board, Guardians and Justices. The fact is that this multiplicity involves a wanton waste of the ratepayers' money, and unnecessarily augments the already too heavy burden of the Rates. Some years ago there was a farm in Gloucestershire of two hundred acres lying in twelve parishes, and subject to fifty Rates! and though this is, no doubt, an extreme example, still it serves to illustrate the variety of the burdens to which the Farmer is exposed. Consolidated Rating was what Mr. Gladstone's Government proposed to introduce, and to what extent, by that measure alone, the burdens upon the Farmers would be lightened, may be gathered from the fact that in the city of Manchester, by a reform of this sort, £3,000 per annum has been saved, so much does the increase of Rates depend upon the number of officials who are employed in their collection. But this was not all that the Liberals proposed to do for the Farmers. Mr. Gladstone in his speeches in Midlothian in November last said, in reference to this subject: "We avowed from the beginning that the state of our County Government was wholly unsatisfactory and must be radically reformed. *We thought the law of liability in England, which threw the whole responsibility for the Rates upon the Tenant, was an unjust law, and we proposed to divide it as it is divided in Scotland.* We know that there was a great desire in the counties to relieve ratepayers from the Consolidated Fund. We saw in that desire, and in the power to relieve the ratepayers from the Consolidated Fund, a strong leverage placed in the hands of the Executive Government to induce all the local interests to come freely into the changes that must be made in order to establish a

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and the Rates

sound system of county government, and to give you, gentlemen, the full and thorough control over the disposal of your own local taxation that you have over the disposal of the Imperial taxes. Before it was in our power to deal thoroughly and effectively with the subject we were removed from office, and our successors took an entirely opposite view. In their view the only thing material was to relieve the ratepayers, or to hand over year by year large sums from the Consolidated Fund. They made no other change whatever, left the present irresponsible authorities in possession, and continued five years in office before they produced even the phantom of a Local Government Bill, and when they produced it they contrived to prepare it in such a way that no party, or section of a party, in the House of Commons shewed the slightest desire to have it. The consequence is, gentlemen, that your Local Government remains in the unsatisfactory position in which it formerly stood, whereas the Imperial Government has gratuitously and prematurely parted with the great inducements which they held in their hands of bringing all parties into a reasonable settlement, and inducing all constituted authorities to come in and to abate their respective pretensions."

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atives and the
Rates.

It being of such pecuniary importance to the Farmer that the Rates should be submitted to some unifying principle, as the Liberal Government proposed, it remains to consider the amount and manner of their incidence, to which Mr. Gladstone referred. The whole sum collected by local authorities is roughly computed at about £51,000,000, of which, if the estimate framed by Mr. Goschen in 1871 remains proportionately unchanged, some £25,000,000 falls upon rural districts. This is a large sum, though it is unlikely that in the future it will be materially increased. Of the items of which this total is composed, that which presses most unfairly upon the Farmers is the Education Rate. It was stated at a meeting of the Farmers' Alliance at Norwich in February last that there was "an instance just beyond the boundaries of Norwich, where the School Board Rate had increased the rental of a not very large Farmer by £50 or £60 a year. The Highway Rate had also caused an equal increase because his farm adjoined two roads over which traffic passed to Norwich from a distance of twenty miles." At a meeting of the Farmers' Alliance in the same month at Burton-on-Trent, similar testimony was given by a Farmer. The hardship upon the Farmer in the matter of the Education Rate consists in this: that he is practically obliged by it to supply the towns of the country with educated artisans. It is not the case, as Farmers are sometimes disposed to imagine, that education is of itself the cause of the prevalent dearth of labour. The real incentive to the educated labourer to benefit himself by leaving farming employment is the wretched condition as to his home and as to his prospects in the future to which the present state of the

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Rate.

Land Laws reduces him. The crippled financial condition of the limited owner, and the impossibility of attracting capital without a compulsory Tenant-Right, are the reasons why the cottages of the English labourers are, in the language of one of the Assistant Commissioners appointed to inquire into the condition of Women and Children in 1869, a "national disgrace." In Belgium and other parts of Europe where the labourer is not only well educated, comparatively speaking, but well housed, there is no such dearth of labour complained of.

The Liberals
and the Rates.

It has been said that this increase of Rates is unfair upon the Farmers. "It is obvious that a leaseholder pays all increase of local burdens up to the end of his term. As for the yearly Tenant he knows that he pays the increase, and he can never be certain that his rent would have been advanced to a proportionate extent if the increase had not taken place. If land is, as many say, not only not too highly taxed, but not taxed enough, the Rates should be levied, at least in part, upon the owners and not entirely on the Tenants. Assuming that Rates are partially paid out of the pockets of the Tenants it is unjust in the extreme that the Farmer should be charged five and often ten times as much for the purposes of Local Government and Poor Relief as the private gentleman, professional man, manufacturer or tradesman enjoying an income at least equal to his own, who resides in the same Parish."* The legislation for the relief of the English Farmer from his unequal burden of Rates proposed by Mr. Gladstone had been already tried with success in Scotland, where it was justly accompanied by a due representation of owners at the County or Parish Boards. In 1871 Mr. Goschen, Liberal member for the City of London, made a report upon this very point. He said: "A division of Rates between owners and occupiers, coupled with an enactment similar to that which prevails in the case of the Income Tax, by which owners are prohibited from exempting themselves by contract from any share in local taxation, would in this respect probably afford considerable pecuniary relief to the occupier of a farm. What places him now at most disadvantage is that he has to pay the Rate in the first instance, and that it is he who must disturb the existing state of things before any part of an unforeseen increase of Rates can be thrown on the owner. His position would be much improved if the onus of changing the rent in consequence of changes in the Rates were put upon the owner, or made equally applicable to them both.† In accordance with this suggestion, the Select Committee of the House of Commons, a House, be it remembered, containing a Liberal majority, reported:—

* W. E. Bear on Agricultural Depression.—*Fortnightly Review*, February, 1879.

†. "Goschen on Local Taxation," p. 166.

(a) That the existing system of Local Taxation, under which the exclusive charge of almost all Rates leviable upon rateable property for current expenditure as well as for new objects and permanent works, is placed by law upon the occupiers, while the owners are generally exempt from any direct or immediate contributions in respect of such Rates, is contrary to sound policy.

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(b) That the evidence taken before your Committee shews that in many cases the burden of the Rates, which are directly paid by the occupier, falls ultimately, either in part or wholly, upon the owner, who, nevertheless, has no share in their administration.

(c) That in any reform in the existing system of Local Taxation, it is expedient to adjust the system of rating in such a manner that both owners and occupiers may be brought to feel an immediate interest in the increase or decrease of local expenditure, and in the administration of local affairs.

(d) That it is expedient to make owners as well as occupiers directly liable for a certain proportion of the Rates.”*

It appears, then, that in 1871 the Liberals were in favour of exempting occupiers from a certain proportion of the Rates, and the proportion fixed was one-half. It has been shewn that the Rates falling upon the rural districts amount to about £25,000,000. *The Liberals, therefore, proposed to relieve the Farmers of Rates amounting to £12,500,000, and were prevented doing so because the Farmers returned the Conservatives to power at the last election. The Conservatives have professed to relieve the Farmers to the amount only of £2,000,000. But what is the nature of this relief?* Mr. Barclay, the Tenant-Farmer member, said the other day “he should be glad to hear how many Farmers had felt themselves relieved of the burden of Local Taxation in consequence. *It simply came to this, that the money now paid in Local Taxation would have to be paid into the Imperial Exchequer, which would be for the most part taking money out of one pocket instead of the other with a loss of 10 or 15 per cent. on the exchange.* He was strongly of opinion that if the taxes were expended and administered by the representatives of those who had to pay them there would be a great reduction in the amount of taxation. With regard to Local Representative Government it was surely humiliating to the Farmers that although the people in the towns obtained Local Representative Government fifty years ago, no broad attempt had been made to confer it upon them.” The Farmers must now have discovered to which of the two parties they would have done well to entrust their interest. They have at length an opportunity of retrieving their mistake of six years ago, and of obtaining at the hands of a

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* Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Local Taxation, 1871.

Liberal Government a reform for which there is imperative urgency and the removal of an injustice which the Conservatives, while pretending to palliate, have resolved to retain in perpetuity.

The fifth
Farmers'
grievance—
Tithes

Another burden upon the Farmer is the Tithe. This has not yet become a leading question, but it merits consideration. During the last seven years the £100 Tithe Rent charge has been worth £112. In this last year of Farmers' misfortunes, owing to the fact that the home produce, being so exceptionally inferior in quality, is given in large quantities to live stock, the value is as high as £115. This shews plainly enough that the calculation of Tithe is based upon an unfair principle. The Liberals have as yet made no declaration upon the question. What have the Farmers, then, to expect from the Conservatives? Thus much. The Government Valuation Bill contained a clause exempting the clergy from taxation for the stipends paid by them to their curates. That exemption would have thrown an additional £100,000 upon the Farmers! It is not enough, then, for the Conservatives to postpone the interests of the Farmers to those of the country gentlemen, but they also desire to impose upon them the taxes of the country clergy!

What have the
Conservatives
done for the
Farmers?

How comes it, then, that the Farmers of the United Kingdom yield such unswerving support to the Conservatives? Why, at the last General Election, did they return 170 Conservative county members against only 49 Liberals? It is plain that, so far as favours to come are concerned, the Farmers can have no hope except from the Liberals. But what have the Conservatives done in the past that gratitude should induce the Farmers to continue to waive their own interests for the sake of the party? No doubt, the old tradition that the Conservatives were Protectionists, and that Protection was a good thing for the Farmers, has something to do with this self-sacrifice on their part. But Farmers nowadays understand what Protection meant, and why the Conservatives were so enamoured of it. They see now that Protection was a benefit, if it was a benefit at all, only to the country gentleman, and a ruin to the Farmer and the rest of the community. As Mr. R. W. Gordon, the delegate to Canada of the Annandale Farmers, said only the other day, "Every shilling of duty put on wheat or beef would give cause for an increase of rent. And justly so, as if a man can grow the same quantity of wheat and beef and sell it for a higher price he can afford to pay more rent. On the other hand, if agricultural produce is taxed, manufactures will be so also; therefore for everything of that sort he will have to pay a higher price. The labourer also will require higher wages, as the cost of his feed and clothing will be enhanced." The condition of the Farmer in the old days of Protection, which the Conservatives under the present Premier fought so stoutly to maintain but which he now so loudly repudiates,

illustrates the truth of Mr. Gordon's view. Agriculture was not merely stationary; it was declining. The whole population was impoverished in order that the Conservative Landlords might have their rents kept up at an artificially high level. In 1834 the pressure of the rates was so heavy that acres upon acres of land were allowed to drop out of cultivation, for *under the old Poor Law, which was amended by the Liberals, the rates in some parishes exceeded 20s. in the pound!* Meantime the agricultural labourers were starving, for the price of bread was such that they could not afford to buy food sufficient to sustain their strength, and the Farmer was a loser by having to pay two enfeebled labourers to do the work of one. Nor even if the Farmer had been able to appropriate, as he could not do, the whole of whatever increment there was upon the natural average price of corn, would he have always been a gainer. Thus in 1835 the average price of wheat, notwithstanding these burdens under which the Farmer was groaning, was 39s. 4d. per quarter. Now let the Farmer consider what the Liberals did for him by abolishing Protection in spite of the opposition of the Conservatives. It is stated by the greatest agricultural statistician in the kingdom, Mr. Caird, that *thirty years ago not more than one-third of the people of this country consumed animal food more than once a week.* The consumption has since then more than doubled, if no regard is paid to the increase of population. *Within the last twenty-five years, in consequence of the abolition of Protection, "the capital value of the live stock of the United Kingdom has risen from £146,000,000 to £260,000,000, being a gain of £114,000,000."** In 1851 Mr. Caird prophesied, at a time when the Conservatives were persuading the Farmers that it would be their ruin, that the Liberal policy of Free Trade "in its extraordinary effect on the welfare of all other classes of the community, would, sooner or later, bear good fruits also to them." As Mr. Gladstone put it, in addressing the Farmers of West Calder in November last, "while the artificial advantage that you got from Protection—as it was supposed to be an advantage—was removed, you were brought into the free and open market and with the enlarging of Free Trade was enlarged the buying capacity of your customers, so that they were willing and able to give you, and did give you, a great deal more for your money in general than you ever got under the system of Protection." He might have added also that the prosperity which the Liberal measure of Free Trade brought to the Farmer's customers not merely increased their buying capacity, but increased the number of those who could afford to buy. Whatever be the claims of the Conservative party upon the Farmers they owe it no gratitude for Protection.

What the
Liberals have
done for the
Farmers.

What benefits, then, have the Farmers received from the present Conservative Government? It has been seen that the Government was desirous of relieving the clergy at their

The Present
Government
and the
Farmers.

* "The Landed Interest and the Supply of Food." J. B. Caird, 1878.

The Malt Tax

expense to the amount of £100,000. A Government should be creditors for a large debt of gratitude before they venture to draw a bill on it to this extent! It has been shewn that the Government could not, if it would, redress the grievances of Tenant-Right, Distress, or Game, because it would at once lose the support of the Conservative members. But there is one standing grievance of the Farmers which it had an excellent opportunity of dealing with—the Malt Tax. The Conservatives entered office with a surplus of £6,000,000 bequeathed to them by the Liberals. *Why did they not then relieve the Farmers of the Malt Tax? Because, being already sure of the Farmers' votes, they feel under no compulsion to gain their favour.* If the Malt Tax is a grievance, and it seems there is some difference of opinion on the question among Farmers, which of the two political parties is the more likely to remove it? Mr. Clare Sewell Read has answered this question for the Farmers in a speech delivered by him in the House of Commons, on July 4th, 1879. *"It was Cobden" (a Liberal) "who advocated the repeal of the Malt Duties, and it was Lord John Russell" (a Liberal) "who said that if he repealed the Corn Laws he would also repeal the Malt Tax."*

The County Government Bill.

The Agricultural Holdings Bill, 1875, by which the Government, with many professions of good will, deceived and betrayed the Farmers, has already been discussed. The County Government Bill, which happily proved abortive, was also a "Landlords' measure," for while it affected to grant representation to the ratepayers it was soon seen to be merely a contrivance for strengthening the hands of the magistracy. The fact is that the Conservative principle is necessarily adverse to the Farmer's interest. The single aim of Conservative legislation, so far as it touches country districts, is the conciliation of a class, the class from which their most influential supporters are taken, the country gentlemen. Hence it is that the Conservatives utterly fail to appreciate Farmers' grievances and Farmers' difficulties. When the Farmer complains they preach him a sermon on economy. But it is not economy that will retrieve the fortunes of agriculture. The land is already suffering from forced economy. The diminished means of the Farmer have compelled him to let it fall into poor condition, so that, so far from economy, it requires an increased expenditure for its restoration. To judge from some of their utterances Conservative Landlords are content that their Farmers should be impoverished provided, as Mr. John Bright said, that they pay their rents. They have not the foresight to see that a holding cannot be done justice to by a Tenant who is at the same time poor, and prevented by unjust laws from being able to borrow capital. As Mr. Bear justly observes, "concentration of capital is the great thing needful for agricultural prosperity, and this is precisely what the laws and customs relating to farming have in almost every imaginable

The Conservatives' view of Farmers' grievances.

way discouraged." This is the Liberal view of the matter. Now what is the Conservative? Lord Burghley, a Conservative elected by the Tenant-Farmers of North Northamptonshire to represent them in the House of Commons, has a much simpler remedy. "*For help*," he said, addressing an agricultural audience in September last, "*Farmers must look to their wives*, who must not go about like grand ladies, but put their shoulders to the wheel. Then the daughters must not be brought up to play the piano, but as Farmers' wives—not to play at lawn-tennis, or to speak French or other languages; they were wanted to exist entirely in this country to assist the agricultural interest"—that is, to assist Lord Burghley to his rents. But Lord Burghley and the Conservative Landlords forget that the British Farmer is a capitalist, and that he is no less justified than his Landlord in expecting an average return upon his capital and skill, and in adjusting his manner of living accordingly. That Farmers should have means and leisure to cultivate the amenities of civilisation is due to the operation of those laws which the Liberals introduced; and if their condition is to be, as it ought to be, still further ameliorated, it will be by the removal of those unwise restrictions which the Conservatives are so resolved to retain. Contrast with Lord Burghley's oration the language of Mr. Gladstone to the Farmers of Dalkeith: "I wish you to believe I am heartily and cordially with you, both in my capacity as a Landlord, and also in my capacity as a candidate before you, not only for the sake of gaining your pledges, but on higher and national grounds, in the struggle to give all possible freedom to the cultivators of the soil, in order that the agriculture of England may have full and fair play in competition with the agriculture of the world."

The Liberal
view of
Farmers'
grievances.

The Conservative Landlords who treat so contemptuously, as has been seen, the Farmer's grievances, nevertheless reckon with assurance upon retaining his political allegiance. He is, as they suppose, too docile an animal to kick against them. They are, at this moment, just upon the eve of the Dissolution, passing a measure through the House, in spite of the protests of the Liberals, by which, with comparative exemption to themselves, they propose to increase the Farmer's burdens. On the 15th of March, 1880, the Chancellor of the Exchequer moved the second reading of the Probate of Wills Bill, the effect of which will be to impose additional taxation upon the savings which a Farmer may have bequeathed for the support of his family after his death. But the Landlord's fortune is to be taxed at a lighter rate! An estate of £1,000 is to pay £3 2s. per cent. duty, but one of £300,000 only £2 13s. 6d. If a landowner leaves an estate worth £100,000, it is at present liable to a duty of between £450 and £600; but if ten Farmers leave £10,000 each, their heirs, who, under the law as

The last Straw
on the
Farmer's back
—The Govern-
ment Probate
Bill.

it stands, pay £2,000, are, under the new Conservative measure, to pay £2,750. Mr. Gladstone pointed out that, even as it is, whereas the value of the stock upon a farm is usually about one-fourth of the Landlord's interest in the farm, yet "the Farmer has to pay more duty upon his stock than the Landlord has to pay upon his farm, which is four times the value of the stock." The plea for this is that it is the real property which has to bear the Rates; but it has been seen that it is the Farmer rather than the Landlord upon whom they fall. The whole effect of the Government Bill was summarised by Mr. Gladstone in an address on March 16th, to a Grantham audience, in these words: "I will tell the Farmer this: *When the Farmer dies the son who succeeds him has now to pay at least five times as much as the son of the Landlord who succeeds his ancestor. The Government are not content with that; they are going to make the son of the Farmer succeeding his father pay six, seven or eight times as much as the son of the Landlord.*" If the Farmers have no spirit to resent this last gratuitous injustice, they will, as Mr. Chaplin sneeringly said, "have no one to blame but themselves," should a return of the Conservatives to power further aggravate their financial distress.

The Farmers' Remedy.

What, then, is the Farmers' remedy? To parody Lord Burghley's sage advice, "*for help they must look to the Liberals.*" The election addresses of the Liberal leaders adopt the grievances of the Farmer and guarantee their removal. The Conservatives deny that they exist. The future of the Farmers is at this election in their own hands. If they cannot find representatives of their own class they need not fight shy of being represented by Liberal landowners. The first principle of Liberalism is, where an established grievance exists, to inquire for and to apply the appropriate remedy. Liberal landowners, like Mr. Pusey, Sir Thomas Acland, Mr. Knatchbull-Inglissen in the House of Commons, and the Marquis of Huntly, the Earl of Leicester, and the Earl of Fife in the House of Lords, have denounced the flagrant injustice under which the Farmers suffer. They have done more. They have, so far as lay in their power, remedied it by their leases. As for those Liberal Landlords who have not yet expressed themselves in favour of a removal of Farmers' grievances, the Farmers may be assured that they will follow the Liberal leaders, and the intention of those leaders to satisfy the Farmers' complaints has been already clearly announced by Mr. Gladstone and the Marquis of Hartington. Nor will the benefits which the Farmers will derive from the fulfilment of these intentions stop short at the repeal of the legal injustice from which they suffer. If, for instance, the Liberals are returned to power, and enact a compulsory Tenant-Right by which, while the Farmer is to receive the value of his unexhausted improvements, he will be liable on the other hand for deterioration, the obsolete restrictions

upon cropping which now trammel agriculture will naturally disappear. Mr. J. B. Lawes, of Rothamstead, one of the first practical agriculturists in England, has shewn that, by the use of special manures, the natural produce of land may be doubled, and thirty-three successive wheat crops have been taken before the soil shewed signs of exhaustion. But the restrictions upon cropping will continue to linger until the Farmer enjoys that Tenant-Right which the Conservatives refuse to grant. The Liberals see that the prosperity of the Farmer is the prosperity of the community, and that he cannot prosper under the disadvantages which now drag him down. These once removed it is certain that the finest agriculture in the world, at length able to attract the capital of which it stands in need, will successfully challenge foreign competition. —“*For help Farmers must look to the Liberals.*”

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